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UNCLAS VIENNA 002332

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: VISA-WAIVER PROGRAM: PASSPORT-RELATED
REQUIREMENTS FOR VWP TRAVELERS AND PARTICIPATING
COUNTRIES

REF: STATE 125862

1. ConGen delivered demarche per reftel on Friday, July 7, to Dr. Heinrich Pawlicek, head of the Interior Ministry's office responsible for passport matters. Our contact expressed some concern about compiling the requested information in the four weeks of peak vacation season, but promised to assemble as much as possible by the August 6 deadline.

2. Pawlicek was not surprised by the request for information, having spoken at length on the need for progress on biometric identifiers at a recent SCIFA meeting. He confirmed that Austria will not/not meet the October 26 deadline for Level I certification. He indicated a delay at the Finance Ministry had caused funding for the Austrian biometric passport to not have been available as quickly as he had originally hoped. His office therefore made the decision to proceed directly to e-passport issuance, beginning in May 2006. Austria will seek Level II certification at that time.

3. There will be no phase-in of the new passports. Passport issuance will be centralized in Vienna on one date, and all passports - diplomatic, official and regular - will be issued as e-passports as of that date. Only emergency passports issued abroad or at the Vienna airport will not be e-passports.

4. In response to our questions, Pawlicek informed us that Austria issues approximately a half-million passports a year, or roughly 42,000 per month. Thus, we can expect that in November and December of 2005 alone, Austrians will obtain approximately 85,000 new passports, none of which will meet the VWP photo-digital passport requirement. A survey by the Austrian government a few years ago indicated that more than 70 percent of Austrian passport applicants travel within Europe. We estimate that of the remaining 30 percent of Austrian travelers, only a third would be traveling to the United States. Using that reckoning, then, we would expect around 4,000 travelers who would normally be able to use the VWP to apply for visas every month. Post notes that our annual NIV workload is currently only around 9,000 applications a year.

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